



Opinion

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## Why CO<sub>2</sub> Levels should be the Issue of Critical Concern as Opposed to Putting Economic Concerns at the Top

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The business world and ordinary people plan long-term economic growth and personal plans as if planetary conditions will be much the same in the future as today. Meanwhile each successive report coming from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a compendium of over 2,000 climate scientists from 195 countries who are experts on climate change, gets direr than the preceding one.

Considering how capitalism is totally dependent upon unceasing growth for its survival, it is inconceivable that the climate warnings are denied and ignored given that the ramifications from extreme weather events will destroy the foundation of world economies.

Recent history reveals that the warming planet is making weather events more volatile. According to the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters in Belgium, from 1983 to 1992 the world averaged 147 climate, water, and weather disasters each year. In the last ten years that number jumped to 306 disasters a year. Since 1992 there have been over 6,600 major disasters worldwide at a cost of \$1.6 trillion in damages killing more than 600,000 people.

Other obvious evidence that the planet is heating up is glacier and polar ice cap loss. In 1850 there were 150 glaciers in Glacier National Park, Montana; today there are only 25 and they're melting fast. The polar ice cap is a biggie. Even though it expands and contracts with the seasons, it loses over 40% of its ice during the summer months and the dark open water absorbs more heat melting more ice. In May 2014 a huge hunk of glacier, the Thwaites Glacier in Antarctica, broke off and is slowly sliding into the sea. Scientists say this glacier assures the planet at least a four foot sea level rise before the end of this century and likely an eleven foot rise by the middle of the next century.

To put that in perspective, lower Manhattan had four feet of water from Hurricane Sandy's storm surge. The difference is, Sandy's storm surge receded; sea level rise will stay. The biggest worry of all is Greenland. If the glaciers in Greenland melt they will raise sea level 28 feet. Coastal areas on all continents contain the highest human populations. An IPCC report suggests that a high sea level rise could displace more than 50 million people.

Land destruction due to severe floods, droughts, mudslides, wildfires, tornados and hurricanes will displace millions more people, disrupt transportation, industry, and agriculture causing food and commodity shortages sending prices skyrocketing. The world will be a very different place and right now most governments aren't addressing the problem aggressively enough to avert those impacts.

We're pumping 110 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere every 24 hours that stays in the atmosphere for over a hundred years. This has increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels from an 800,000 year average of 280 parts per million to today's 400 parts per million and raised the planetary average temperature by 0.8 degrees Celsius (1.4 degrees Fahrenheit).

A big disappointment at the COP-20 Climate Summit in Lima Peru was raising the maximum global temperature boundary from the previously agreed upon 2 degree Celsius to 3.5 degrees Celsius to which many scientists strongly object. Most scientists urgently warn that the .8 degrees Celsius that we've already reached after burning over 500 Billion tons of carbon is almost halfway to the previously agreed upon 2 degree limit and look at the rapid increase in global extreme weather events we are already experiencing. Therefore, humanity can only burn another 565 Billion tons of carbon to get us to the 2 degree level and right now we have 2,795 Billion tons of carbon in inventory to burn – that's 5 times more fossil fuel than we can afford to burn and expect to survive. If we burn that much it may drive the planetary temperature as high as 6 degrees Celsius (10.8 degrees Fahrenheit). This is why the Keystone tar sands oil deposits and drill baby drill is a disastrous energy policy.

It's a shame that the COP-20 Lima Accord caved kicking the can further into the future for generations yet to come to struggle with. It is imperative that world leaders, politicians and industry get serious about reducing carbon emissions when they negotiate the climate treaty at the COP – 21 Climate Summit in Paris in 2015. We have to leave carbon in the ground or humans won't be around and the economy will be a moot point.

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